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December 8, 2021

The Honorable Sydney Kitson, Chair
Board of Governors
State University System of Florida
325 West Gaines Street, #1614
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Marshall M. Criser, III, Chancellor
Board of Governors
State University System of Florida
325 West Gaines Street, #1614
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Chair Kitson and Chancellor Criser:

I write to bring your attention to a disturbing *Tampa Bay Times* report, “UF researchers felt pressure to destroy COVID-19 data, faculty report says.”¹ The article highlights a UF faculty report on academic freedom² that details several items that strike at the heart of academic freedom, including pressure to destroy COVID-19 data and censorship over academic materials on race. This is part of a disturbing pattern of attacks on free speech and academic freedom³ at Florida’s flagship public university that includes attempts to censor professors from testifying before the Florida Legislature against proposed voter suppression laws.

Having served as Florida’s Education Commissioner, I know firsthand the importance of preserving academic freedom at our universities. Unfortunately, Governor DeSantis appears not to agree, and frankly, it is becoming increasingly obvious that he is the source of the censorship. Something as important as the integrity, rigor, and reputation of Florida’s universities should be above politics. Tragically, this appears not to be the case.

¹ Divya Kumar. “UF researchers felt pressure to destroy COVID-19 data, faculty report says.” *Tampa Bay Times*. December 7, 2021. <https://www.tampabay.com/news/education/2021/12/06/uf-researchers-felt-pressure-to-destroy-covid-19-data-faculty-report-says/>

² Issa R, Bernhard M, Cousins RJ, Kohnen A, Lynne S, Wright D. “Report of the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom.” https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mB6mjqdE6bqdQcXOhX_5pUpRhnsik2X8/edit

³ Deepa Shivaram. “The University of Florida bars professors from testifying in a voting rights case.” *NPR*. October 31, 2021 <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/30/1050817670/university-florida-professors-free-speech-voting-rights>

Florida universities receive more than \$1 billion annually in Pell Grants, and as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I want taxpayers to be getting all they can for their investment. Academic freedom is a pillar of what makes American universities the greatest in the world. Communist China has party-run universities. We reject that nonsense in Florida.

As you know, the Board of Governors oversees the State University System of Florida. Thousands of my constituents, both proud UF alumni and students dreaming one day to become a Gator, are depending on robust academic freedom at the University of Florida. Therefore, I urge the Board of Governors to review the allegations and conduct a full and fair investigation into the state of academic freedom and the source of these apparent attacks on academic freedom. In addition, the Board should set and enforce robust standards protecting academic freedom going forward for our students and our universities. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of this request. Florida students are counting on you.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

CC: The Honorable Richard Corcoran, Education Commissioner
The Honorable Brian Lamb, Vice Chair, Board of Governors
The Honorable Timothy M. Cerio, Board of Governors
The Honorable Aubrey Edge, Board of Governors
The Honorable Patricia Frost, Board of Governors
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